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MATERIAL RITES

The Royal British Society of Sculptors promotes excellence in sculpture, and as President of the Society it gives me great pleasure to see this exhibition, 'Material Rites' at the RBS. Bringing together for the first time, nine sculptors from Scotland, who work across the breadth of materials from traditional to new technologies, it is both an inspiration and a challenge to experience. These artists explore, analyse and unravel ways of working that are unexpected and reflect the changing dimensions of today's society. Sandy Wood, as curator has brought his experience and knowledge of these nine artists to create a show that is a discovery of its own making. I would like to congratulate Sandy Wood, Curator of 'Material Rites' for bringing together such an outstanding show of our colleagues from Scotland

Johannes von Stumm
President
Royal British Society of Sculptors

Material Rites at Inspace: the philosophy of art and informatics

Making sculpture is basically additive or reductive. It is something you do when the edges feel limiting or when the illusory space is not enough.

It is about an obsession with things, the structure and matter of our surroundings, the form and space of our environment. Sculpture is informed through the senses and makes statements about our existence in the world. Sculptors have ascendancy over their materials and are aware of the specific qualities inherent in their constituent parts, acknowledging the history that materials have in the language of objects. Sculpture is sited and connects to the use of that place.

As the world changes sculpture changes. Sculptors revisit and interrogate established methods, explore current technologies and establish new vocabularies. The materiality and physicality in the processes and artefacts is responsive to the effect of our information society.

Material Rites raises essential questions about progression through collaboration and co-operation. To engage in the activity of making art, artists need to be involved in an exchange with others who are also inquisitive about the fabric of our existence. Often ambiguous and unfixed from scientific rationality, the divergent activities of artists create approaches that suggest alternative perspectives.

Stuart Bennett
Head of the School of Art
Edinburgh College of Art

Since 2000 the Alt-w Fund has supported emergent artistic practice in Scotland. The fund has encouraged the exploration of experimental and interactive artforms that make use of technology as both platform and medium, and recognise the changing role that digital culture has in our society today. In 2008 we adjusted the selection criteria to recognise the increasing importance of object-based new media practice. An exemplary project was 'Cybraphon' by FOUND. This autonomous emotional robot band in a box held up a mirror to the ever present face of social media. The rise of the neo-narcissist had found the perfect foil.

FOUND have contributed the Alt-w funded 'The End of Forgetting' to Material Rites. How should we live our lives in a world where the Internet records everything and forgets nothing? The internet even has the ability to replicate our thoughts and actions so that we can pervade a wider digital world without clicking a finger. Alongside the exhibition, Inspace will host a RepRap sleepover. These 3D printers have the ability to replicate themselves. As it becomes possible to create self-thinking objects that completely dispense with humans, the material — and philosophical — impact could be significant.

Mark Daniels
Executive Director
New Media Scotland

Foreword

A pair of socks is no less suitable to make a painting with than wood, nails, turpentine, oil and fabric.
Robert Rauschenberg

Everyone knows materials. They define our existence in matter and as energy they shape and control it. Consider the nearest material to you, the meanings, memories and senses it evokes. Are you actually touching something or are there other forces at work. It is remarkable to think that the table in front of you, the chair you're sitting on or the pen in your hand are just a collection of particles, held together by energy. If this energy was broken or overpowered by gravity then everything around us would instantly dissolve into one huge lump of material ambiguity. Indeed, has the category of material now properly expanded so time, sound, air, gravity and light have become matter in the traditional sense of the word?

Thinking about artworks from a material perspective – what they are made of and how the artists have adapted them to suit a new context – always fascinates me. Artistic interventions can be subtle or 'in your face' but the materials always mutate in some way. Non-traditional materials are creatively manipulated just like painters manipulate paint, but the dynamics of conceptual innovation and the semiotics of material not form are amplified.

The interpretation of art has predominantly been preoccupied with the criticism of form. Although art in non-traditional materials has been developing since Duchamp renounced 'retinal art' in 1912, the critical analysis of material has largely focused on technical

concerns. This position seems anachronistic today as the category of material meanings has played an intrinsic role in the evolution of art over the past century. Since the anarchic play of Dada, Surrealist object games and the conceptual challenges presented by Duchamp's 'readymades', material statements have grown to envelope Western art. The arguments made by 20th Century movements such as Minimalism, Arte Povera, Conceptualism, Fluxus and Pop Art were transmitted through material (or immaterial) experimentation, allowing art to flourish in its current plethora of configurations.

'Material Rites' is a platform for examining the overlooked area of materiality in contemporary sculptural practice, to introduce a different interpretive element for audiences and establish new connections between the artists and the works.

The exhibition does not presume to give answers; its intention is to reveal the material aptitudes of a group of Scottish based artists who work with a diverse array of materials and media. Each artist demonstrates an individual approach; a recognition of the personalities and associations of their materials, which play a fundamental role in communicating their ideas. If a defining characteristic can be garnered from the group of artists, it is a need to 'get their hands dirty' – conceiving and adapting through materials during the creative process is an intrinsic part of the works development.

The atmospheres of the two venues hosting 'Material Rites' are vastly different but both are perfectly suited to the idea of the working process. The Royal British Society of Sculptors has a studio feel with a unique blend of the historic and modern, while Inspace, Edinburgh evokes a distinctly futuristic atmosphere in the

mould of the research laboratory. Each venue lends a particular spatial environment to the works on show, picking up on certain aspects and amplifying or dampening them.

Postmodern art has brought the subjective view and creative imagination back into its own. Accordingly in this catalogue the traditional curatorial essay has been replaced with a story. Art should be accessible through more than one means; materials are a democratic hub for developing individual interpretations. Art's relationship with its public has changed, so why not a changed system of interpretation? Through the story – a piece of subjective inspiration garnered from speaking to the artists about materials – I hope you will be able to find some personal inspiration and imagination of your own.

"Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists – they leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach." **Sol Lewitt**

Sandy Wood
Curator

Matter to magic and back: a Material odyssey

Having travelled for seven days and nights I finally reach my destination. I find a monumental box brimming with an opaque liquid, viscous like water. Cuboid in shape, the box is the size of a swimming pool but its walls seem to be no thicker than a sheet of paper. The walls constantly shift as they move clockwise and counter-clockwise, slotting behind and in front of each other before continuing on their infinite journey. Yet no liquid escapes, it is held motionless, in a state of utter calm and tranquillity. From the foam walkway above people drop gleaming spheres that remind me of something though I don't know what. They bounce without splashing from the surface of the liquid and continue upwards - slowly, unbound by gravity - before becoming lodged in the floating wooden ceiling. The impact makes no sound. My understanding regresses to a childlike wonder and I think "how can this be?"

I approach the foam stairs of the walkway to get a better view of the happening above me. Tentatively I raise my leg to begin the ascent but my foot goes straight through the material. Though it is visible I cannot feel anything solid. I know this is not a dream. I reach out my hand to test it again. It is definitely authentic; solid and perceptible but its texture is all wrong; it feels like wet cement and is freezing to the touch.

Disorientation and confusion set in but it somehow feels okay, I have a memory of this. I put aside my apprehension and go for the second step; my foot goes through again but is supported by nothing below. I walk upwards one step at a time as the stairs envelope my shins, their invisible solidity reassuring my sense of confidence. I reach the walkway and approach the people who drop the spheres as though participating in a timeless ritual. "What are you doing?" I ask. They reply as one, in a language foreign to me but I understand: "I don't know. I have always done this since I can remember. It feels natural, the material tells me what to do and I perform for it. There is no end to this; we and the spheres will be here forever."

There are five piles of spheres to the sides of the walkway, these piles do not diminish as they are drawn from and as I gaze more intently I notice each pile is different. Two people are exchanging spheres as if involved in some kind of transaction. It is a democratic exchange; each sphere appears to have equal value. Each type has a unique colour, texture and luminosity but they all weigh the same. Intrigued I approach the couple. They hold the spheres in front of them like a defence mechanism; there is a strange



possessive nature to their body language. They need the spheres and vice-versa but who is in control? Without prompt one of them begins speaking, they address me directly but their expression is distant, disjointed from reality. "The spheres are our society; we live by them and through them. They control our existence and our destiny, our past, present and future. Each has a certain meaning, a value to us, but their forms and meanings are not constant, they have mutated over history. Here." The man passes me a sphere; it is liquid but retains its shape, it resonates in my mind as the liquid metal envelopes my hands. "You hold Thought; it is of Mercury and is the most unstable. Hermes brought it here. Our community operates through it, it gives being to our psyche." How can a material have such power? It takes all my will to hand it back. The other passes me her sphere, it has a dull sheen and its weight is surprising, I drop it but it does not move, remaining in an impossible stasis. "This is Time" she says. "It is lead and fell from Saturn with Chronos before we remember. It is anachronistic and controls that which we do not understand." I feel dislocated, older than time but younger than creation, as if I have complete knowledge but none at all. Before I realise, they are all around me. They speak in turn, but the sound comes from all around. "This is Energy" the first of them says, holding a rusty looking sphere that emits a human frailty. Iron I think. "It is magnetic and responsible for all conflict and resolution, embodying emotional and physical action." Another steps forward. "Here is Gravity. Artemis and Diana released its silver matter from the moon. It grounds us but also yields fantasy." I see the silver sphere tarnishing and regaining its shine as if by will. The final sphere is not possessed like the others. It hovers

above the man who is last to speak. "Above is Spirituality." I can feel its radiating heat and an imperceptible sense of wellbeing descends over me. "It is gold and keeps our society alive; it gives us hope and is a medicine for our ills. For it we are indebted to Aurora." In the same way they appeared they suddenly are no longer there, having returned to the material rituals that demark their reality.

The meanings of the spheres are elusive yet fixed. I understand them immediately but can't comprehend their mystery. Connected with another world both tangibly and intangibly I struggle to apprehend the line between authenticity and illusion as my body connects with the materials around me. Logic is lost. I stumble to the end of the walkway; there is a child's toy in front of me. Surely it doesn't belong here? I bend down to pick it up but it divides into a hundred copies. They begin tumbling up the stairs. I follow them to a plateau where the horizon is unfixed. The toys stretch as far as the eye can see, set out in what seems to be a hierarchical sequence. They are communicating with each other, inanimate objects in full animation. It is bio-electronic, verging on human but networked. Suddenly a decision is audible and they all turn to point in one direction. I follow their lead and find myself at the entrance to a cave. It is a memory. There is a dial embedded in a tall rock at the entrance to the cave. It is out of place but intriguing, tactile, tempting, almost dangerous. Turning it I lose my place and find myself back where I was seven days and seven nights ago.

Sandy Wood
Curator



Gemma Coyle

Think of traditional materials, not many people will have a connection to marble in a child-like way. Gemma Coyle

Gemma Coyle's openness and experimental attitude to materials and awareness of social connections strongly directs her practice. She grew up in a town with industrial roots and previous generations of her family were very much craftsmen who worked with their hands. This gave her a fascination for machines, materials and mechanisms. Childhood material engagement and discovery is subconsciously released in her work and entices the viewer back to their own childhood encounters and learning experiences. Coyle has utilised and distilled these encounters at art college, and displays a disciplined experimental, anything goes (as long as it's heartfelt) attitude that is essential to her art.

Coyle's appreciation of materials is grounded in the emotional, instinctive and playful but it is also focussed by an intelligent understanding of their background and origins. There is a reason for every element in her sculptures and Coyle's ethic of recycling, re-using and reinterpreting materials sits comfortably with her sustainable philosophy. The bricks in 'Top uses for Heavy Weapons: No 3 Barbecue' were made in Britain, while the mechanisms come from China. The work is inspired by cloud seeding, pioneered at the Olympics in China. What would happen if this somewhat ridiculous use of technology descended into complete farce? Picture the scene if it was used at a distinctly British barbecue. By using the materials to reflect and comment on stereotyped cultural differences Coyle parodies the somewhat childish technological one-upmanship we have descended into as a global community.

Gemma Coyle studied Painting and Drawing at Edinburgh College of Art from 1999–2005. Since graduating she has exhibited widely and participated in group shows in the UK and has recently had a solo show in the Patriothall Gallery, Edinburgh.

• www.edinburghsculpture.org/artist.aspx?artist=Gemma+Coyle



FOUND

It's always really exciting playing with sounds in space. Tommy Perman

FOUND are Ziggy Campbell, Tommy Perman and Simon Kirby; an eclectic ensemble experimenting in the boundaries of music, language, art, design and technology. Operating in that space in-between, their ideas push material limits.

Sound is the basis that informs the physical manifestation of the object. FOUND have a deep understanding of the intrinsic qualities of sound, its interactive nature, its perception and how it transforms and is affected by space, objects and people. In their hands sound is sculpted as a tangible material with the ability to affect physical change in the viewer. This physicality interests them in terms of the accessibility of their work. As Kirby states "Sound can give something life as well as interaction, these two are key, not how it looks, that's not important as to how alive something is."

There are feelings of mystery, memory, intrigue, anticipation and enticement when experiencing a FOUND work. 'The End of Forgetting' has a memory that can be accessed, making concrete a psychological activity in a playful way and materialising behaviour while simultaneously generating new behaviours in the viewer.

FOUND works are true to sound; non-tampered sounds from real sources and instruments have a particular resonance with the world and our understanding of how sound relates to materials. Appearances make you want to touch the work and interact to find out what will happen. Its performance is mysterious; what is it and how does it work? Experimentation and chance are conspicuous in the making process and the viewer's interactive experience. How do we know what is actual and what is virtual anymore? Where are the boundaries between sound, person and object? In FOUND's materialism a hyper-real 21st Century conundrum is creatively explored.

FOUND are an Edinburgh based arts collective/band formed in 2003 by Gray's School of Art graduates, Ziggy Campbell and Tommy Perman. Since then they have collaborated with a number of artists and musicians and most recently developed a partnership with Simon Kirby, Professor of Language Evolution at the University of Edinburgh. Their recent work 'Cybraphon' was the winner of the 2009 BAFTA Scotland award in the interactive category.

• www.found-electronics.net



◀ Materials of
Scott Laverie
(film still)

Scott Laverie

Scott Laverie's dark and surreal juxtapositions of materials, objects and self throw up connections to the sculptural and bodily experiments of Bruce Nauman, Fluxus's recognition of the body as material and Gilbert and George's 'living sculptures'. The works' split dimension of animation and moving image takes further the questioning of disciplinary boundaries gestated by Minimalist performed experiments from the likes of Robert Morris.

The Minimalists denied rationalist or idealist access to meaning through reduction. Laverie's work displays similar qualities but possesses a mystery and magic that take the viewer into a world semi-detached from our realms of understanding. Informed by his dual personality as an artist and craftsman of high end furniture, Laverie relies on the constant struggle between his imagination and reality to create the visions in his work; the clash between knowledge and naivety that stems from a life determined by material contrasts. In 'Schoolhouse' the imagination fights against its invasion by strange sentient futuristic building blocks; the artist is a maker of objects but one not in complete control. As the materials instil and impart weird reactions and surreal moments, the mind fills in the gaps. The schoolhouse context defines the redux that takes place.

Questioning our psychological and bodily relationship to materials and objects we have forgotten about due to their familiarity, we are left to glimpse into our psyche, to a world where our knowledge of materials counts for nothing. Laverie regresses our understanding, allowing our liberated imaginations the experience of starting again. By paring back, the artist clears the way to injecting his personality, creating his own reflection of a material induced madness.

Scott Laverie studied Painting and Drawing at Edinburgh College of Art and graduated in 2003. Since then he has exhibited in a number of solo and group exhibitions in Scotland and in Germany.

- www.scottlaverie.co.uk
- www.edinburghsculpture.org/artist.aspx?artist=Scott+Laverie



Lyndsay Mann

The conversations of why you are drawn to a material come up when you're considering using it. When you've found it works and you're happy with its history, how pliable it is, how much you can control it and how it speaks and communicates when it's installed, it's something you don't have to keep coming back to. Lyndsay Mann

Lyndsay Mann has built a deep understanding of how various material meanings and characteristics can be harnessed. The 'toolbox of materials' she is now comfortable with allows her mind to focus on how they can be properly interleaved in the conversations of her work.

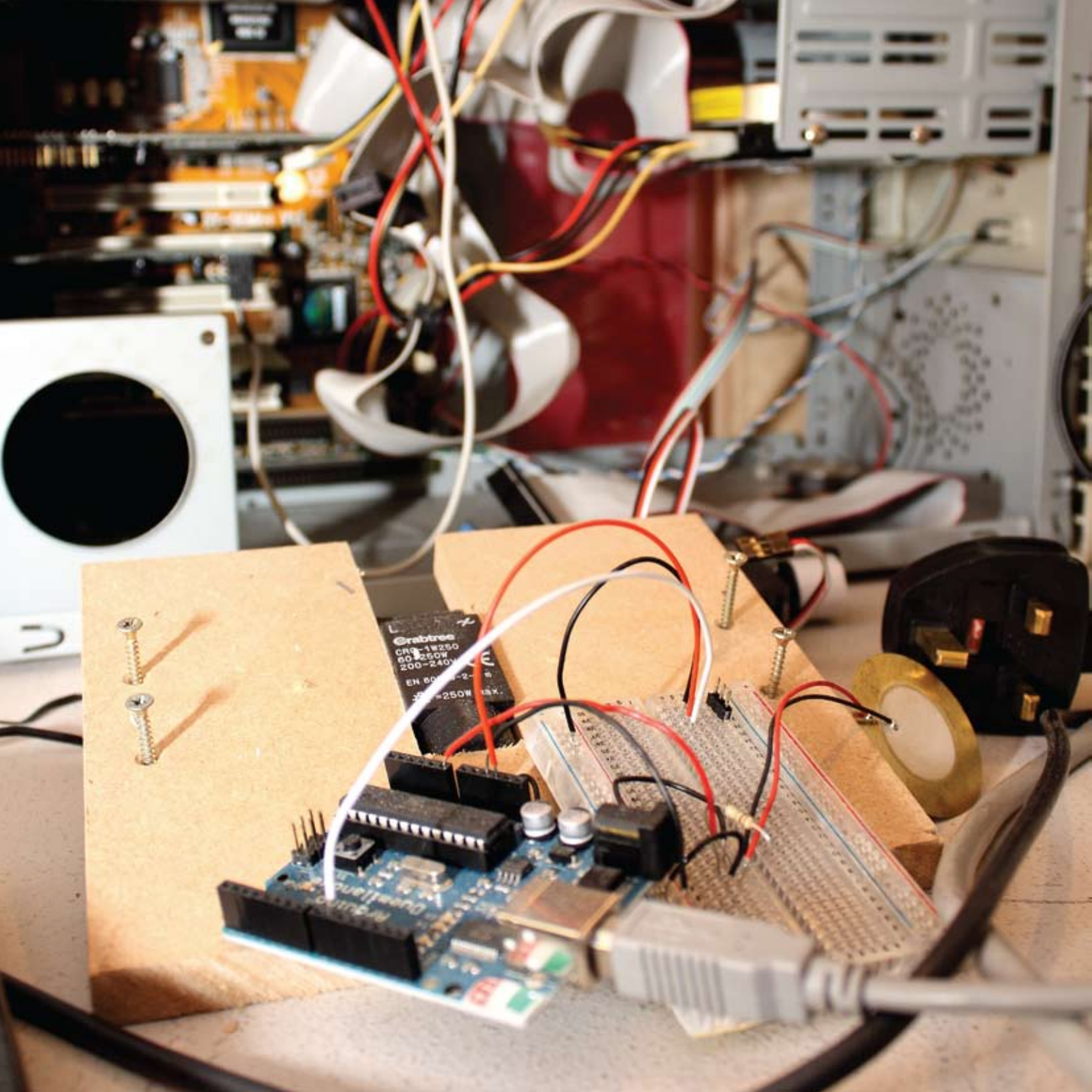
Mann's practice revolves around building up a dialogue within the material. By working it down to a base state that highlights the ideas she most wants to reference an initial statement is intangibly vocalised. Then a process of editing and rebuilding the materials develops an intrinsic web of communication. This plays a specific role within the overall many-sided conversation of the work itself.

Giving physicality to the elusive themes of ideology, communication, relationship dynamics, ritual and acceptability, Mann explores these ideas that fit into a larger story involving subtleties of history, nationality and language. Juxtaposed material commentaries, often involving sound, video, edited found sources, sculptural assemblage and felt drawings feed into research and development, helping Mann reach an enveloping multi-media narrative.

Ideas or doctrines are always related to a physical body, but how can they be harnessed from the ethereal? Through her material statements Mann helps manifest the processes of instinct, belief and behaviour, which incorporate an elusive web of physical and psychological responses.

Lyndsay Mann studied Printmaking and Photomedia at Central Saint Martins graduating in 1995 and Public Art: Concept and Development Course at Westminster University in 1999. Since then she has exhibited in a number of solo and group shows in the UK and has featured in Art Review and Frieze Magazine.

• www.lyndsaymann.com



David McAllister

It is quite plausible that in 10 years or less I will no longer be saying I am part of the Glasgow or Edinburgh art scene, but rather part of an art scene comprising a larger network of connected organisations, no longer defined by the boundaries of physicality but by the localised interests of a global catchment. I feel this kind of model would allow artists the opportunity to develop and reclaim locally meaningful work in a virtual networked environment. David McAllister

David McAllister is a traditional sculptor in the making sense, but with a new set of tools and materials at his disposal. His practice revolves around the idea that the definition of the craftsman requires expanding to recognise changing technologies. What is the new way of making for the 21st Century sculptor?

Employing a 'made in China' aesthetic McAllister combines the material languages of traditional sculpture and popular consumer culture to create objects that comment on the somewhat deluded commercial notion of a technologically achievable 'better alternative'. Machined wooden sculptures with hi-gloss seamless finishes and traditional dove-tailed hand-crafted techniques parody the concept of technological enlightenment. McAllister speaks of a 'manufacture of consent', where we are conditioned to react fetishistically to corporate products through the marvel of their aesthetic design. How does this translate the traditional materials of the sculptor?

Through the pseudonym 'Invisibleknowledge' McAllister creates mini-tribes or subcultures as a metaphor for our survival of the popular culture wilderness. Through their online presence the 'Garden Shrubs' embark on a misguided quest to learn everything about the world of gardening, enabling them to reach the empowered position of a cultural shaman. With this purposefully ridiculous proposition McAllister asks are we really empowered or just confused.

David McAllister studied Sculpture at Edinburgh College of Art graduating in 2003 and completed a Master's Degree in Interactive Art & Design at Falmouth College of Art in 2006. He has exhibited in Scotland, England and the USA since 2000.

• www.invisibleknowledge.net



Gordon Munro and Ewan Robertson

Exhibiting a sphere of red hot iron or creating a minute monument to the recent mass bee deaths with iron sourced from the mind of each deceased bee. Poetic reflections on crossing the boundaries of common sculptural dimensions are a flavour of how Munro and Robertson have been inspired by a focused artistic enquiry into a single material. Through their project 'Beyond Use', the artists are intensively investigating the meanings, histories and properties of one of earth's most ubiquitous elements: iron. By melding and inverting ideas and phenomena an innovative exploration and expansion of sculptural theory and practice can occur.

Iron holds many levels of fascination. It is a regulator in the body and its texture and propensity to rust give it a welcoming glow, honesty, a soul even. It began man's technological discovery and is the predominant element in our planet's core. It exists in liquid, gaseous and solid states and certain properties lend it a human fallibility. Its weight and presence ground it physically, while its existence as tiny particulates of dust locates it beside the foundations of life. Magnetite, a form of iron oxide, exists in whales, dolphins, sharks, bees and homing pigeons; its magnetism is their navigational device. Whatever we do to iron it won't go away or diminish; the same quantity will always exist.

By melting down existing iron objects to create new objects 'Beyond Use' can help people leap beyond the constraints of form and think about the transfer of ideas through material. As the project progresses, more conceptual experiments and extra-disciplinary collaboration will inform theoretical and practical material explorations. A genetic story of material is emerging. 'Beyond Use' reverses the alchemical map, returning us to the origins and meanings of base matter.

Gordon Munro studied Sculpture at Edinburgh College of Art graduating in 1985 and a Postgraduate Diploma in Sculpture in 1986. He has since exhibited internationally and is co-founder of the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop; and from 1990 he has been a Lecturer at Edinburgh College of Art.

Ewan Robertson studied Sculpture at Edinburgh College of Art from 1987–1994. He has since exhibited internationally and is currently a Lecturer in Sculpture at Edinburgh College of Art.

◀ Materials of
Gordon Munro and
Ewan Robertson

- www.gordonmunro.info
- www.edinburghsculpture.org/artist.aspx?artist=Ewan+Robertson



Bill Scott

Air is matter, light is a material. Matter and materiality are difficult to define and this informs the need for space as a positive element in my sculpture. Bill Scott

Bill Scott expresses a deep interest in the cutting edge scientific questioning of matter; how it makes up our universe and defines our existence. We are shaped by the spaces we inhabit and conditioned by their philosophical and physical effects. This idea of how we live is multifariously reflected through Scott's material assertions.

Having had a lifetime to interact with his favoured materials he has developed an affinity with their personality, characteristics and atmospheric qualities. It is safe to say that in wood he has found a material that ticks all the right boxes. Wood has an energy and spirituality that intimately connects it to the history, patterns, experiences and rituals of humanity. It has a versatility that allows for an inexhaustible process of discovery and a composition which encourages personal mark making interactions - something the artist can draw upon to echo materials' anthropogenic history.

Wood is a living material. Growing trees reach out for light and space and rely on atmosphere, interacting with light and air as a means of staying alive. Wood breathes. This is one of the most important ideas in considering Scott's materiality: the metaphysical. A long standing interest in philosophical enquiry is transferred as he employs tangible matter as a force to measure the intangible materials of energy, air, light and gravity. Through this relationship elusive matter is brought into being as material - whether we can touch it or not.

◀ Materials of
Bill Scott

Bill Scott studied at Edinburgh College of Art from 1953–1959 and Ecole des Beaux, Paris, from 1959–1960. He has since exhibited internationally with a recent solo show at the Inverness Museum and Art Gallery. He is currently President of the Royal Scottish Academy and Chairperson of the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop.



Derek Sutherland

For Derek Sutherland every material is fair game. It doesn't matter where it has come from or where you might expect it to be. The associations of objects or materials are the real grounding for a work of art; inspiring tools with which to attack common assumptions or the façade that is 21st Century reality.

Sutherland's material practice often revolves around odd news stories and the recognition of context; how it can be harnessed, manipulated and communicated to create a narrative for the viewer to navigate. Starting with a blank canvas is an impractical notion; things need to be loaded with (often peculiar) meaning to create the base from which to begin the journey from material to artwork. Taking inspiration from Arte Povera, Pop Art and Fluxus Sutherland humorously bestows the failed or mundane with a temporary anecdotal value before returning it to its inconsequential existence. None of his works survive, the materials always return to their roots.

How is the viewer going to react when they find the unexpected in the gallery - Annoyed? Ambivalent? Amused? Curious? Confused? Disorientated? Fooled? These are all important reactions Sutherland aims to evoke through a public material vandalism that tampers with familiarity and questions what the 'correct' art encounter is.

Issues of form, colour and composition, combined with those less visible factors beneath the surface draw his attention. The material itself acts as a catalyst to the creative process. The important thing is that he makes discoveries over time. He collects things and lives amongst them before entering into the process of making. This process nearly always entails making the piece on the spot, forming energy from the unpredictable, improvisational and eclectic. The idea may diverge and the original object may be replaced but the strands of thinking derived from the material continue to flow through the making process.

Derek Sutherland studied Sculpture at Edinburgh College of Art from 1999–2006. Since graduating he has exhibited in a number of group shows in Scotland and most recently in Australia. He is an elected member of the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop Committee.

• www.dereksutherland.com

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Finally, I would like to thank the artists themselves, whose enthusiasm in difficult financial times has been refreshing and inspirational.

Sandy Wood
Curator

'Material Rites'
Curated by Sandy Wood

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www.rbs.org.uk
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► **Cover image:**

FOUND

The End of Forgetting
[detail]

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FOUND/FOUND

Lyndsay Mann/Lyndsay
Mann

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